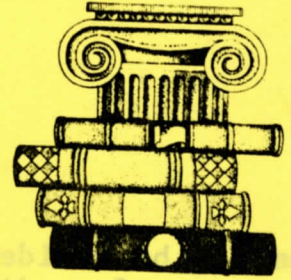


COLLOQUIA



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Edited by Barbara McManus and Roxanne Zimmer

A Legacy of Books

William J. Bennett's report on the work of the National Endowment for the Humanities Study Group bears the title "To Reclaim a Legacy," words which imply a sense of loss and a challenge. The legacy, the collected wisdom of the ages, the common language of our culture, recorded in the philosophical, historical and literary classics which line our library shelves, yearly becomes less and less familiar to more and more of our students.

Members of the academic community throughout the nation have recognized this reality. It has been evident for some time, reflected not only in curricula, but also in the awarding of academic credentials for achievement not nearly comparable to that of graduating students of not too many years back when humanities were the heart of curricula. The members of the NEH Study Group--names illustrious in the field of education--whose findings have contributed to this report, have presented this awareness in statistics which cannot be gainsaid; Mr. Bennett has encompassed it in his challenging question as to "whether today's colleges and universities are offering to America's youth an education worthy of our heritage."

It is a question which cannot be ignored for many reasons, only one of which is Mr. Bennett's recent appointment as Secretary of Education. It is a question which requires soul-searching by every institution attesting to the name of a liberal arts college, a question which necessitates consideration of the study group's recommendation for "curricula based on a clear vision of what constitutes an educated person, regardless of major." This particular recommendation is reminiscent of Cardinal Newman in his The Idea of a University, in which he said that it is in this academic environment that a student "profits by an intellectual tradition . . . which guides him in his choice of subjects and duly interprets for him those which he chooses," (where) a habit of mind is formed which lasts through life, "what I venture to call a philosophical habit." For Newman "liberal education and liberal pursuits are exercises of the mind, of reason, of reflection." This is college-level learning unadulterated.

It is a level attained through reading, and the Study Group says this too with respect to its recommendation that a curriculum "should

embody both wide and close reading" and in terms of the "highest purpose of reading is to be in the company of great souls." It is a recommendation that requires at least one or two additional descriptors, i.e., "reflection" (Newman again) and articulation. One expects a college-educated person to have read, to be able to consider those readings, and in turn to be equipped to intelligently express, in written or spoken words, any new ideas he might bring to the question. When we consider the October 1984 findings of the Study Group on the Conditions of Excellence in American Higher Education that student performance on 11 of 15 major subject area tests of the Graduate Record Examinations declined between 1964 and 1982, with the sharpest declines in subjects requiring high verbal skills, we cannot but beat our breasts. Or can we?

During the morning session of the recent Convocation of the faculty of the four schools of the college and of the library of the College of New Rochelle, William Sharwell, new President of Pace University, a man with a foot in two worlds, the entrepreneurial and the academic, spoke of balance in this era which future generations may call Mammonistic. It is a time of confusion, of disarray, of "double-speak" in the world, the nation and that microcosm which is the college campus. Students are under duress to acquire an entré into the world of money, success and the good life. Colleges are under the strain of maintaining their integrity as arbiters of educational quality, at the same time coping with the exigencies of dwindling funds, competition for attracting students, and the desire to respond to the disadvantaged since, as the ad says, "A mind is a terrible thing to waste." It is - and every individual in society should have the opportunity of being educated to his greatest potential. On the other side of the coin, however, are we ready to forfeit for generations to come the minds and ideas of the past? "What we do today," says William Cronon in Changes in the Land, "is reshaping the past." Only if we are aware of the past can we do this well. Santayana has warned us: "Those who do not remember the mistakes of the past are condemned to repeat them."

Higher education is in a quandary. The way out can come only through calm reflection, intelligence, integrity and reason, and dedication to the goals of excellence. Colleges cannot be all things to all men. They can serve true learning, to which the erstwhile graduates of our own institution testified at the fall Senate Forum; they can provide professional and career training, no longer assuring a true liberal arts education; and they can reach out to and open windows for impoverished minds. Perhaps it will be only a few who will be able to continue to educate in conformity with what promises to be an increasingly stringent accreditation process and the NIE Study Group's consideration of "the interactive effects of various types of student financial assistance on both short-range and long-term outcomes of postsecondary education."

We have to start someplace. The initial reforms are already taking place in the lower schools - the soil must be tilled before it will bear fruit. The legacy which we cannot lose involves the eternal questions

of the human tribe and goes beyond individual stories of mankind's separate group identities. I agree with Mr. Bennett; it can be found in books.

Rosemary Lewis



*Not only were we naked, crazed, and starving
(and far from our warm little homes),
we were without any good books as well.*

Should We Praise or Bury Bennett's Books?

The faculty of the School of Arts and Sciences should be pleased that some of the important issues we addressed in the last four or five years concerning our curriculum, and which we are now in the process of re-evaluating, are the subject of a nationwide debate.

Now, as before, we face two tasks. We must provide a description of the liberally educated graduate of the School of Arts and Sciences. We must also determine what role or part the curriculum suggested in William Bennett's report on Humanities in Education should play in producing such a graduate. Instead of dismissing Bennett's report as simply a renascent manifestation of atavistic cultural imperialism, we should attempt to answer the questions posed at the end of the report. I do not think that the discussion on February 19th, because of time limitations, adequately addressed some of the substantive educational issues raised by Bennett's concluding questions.

Before offering some opinions I would like to expose a false dichotomy which might divert our attention from considering the role Bennett's report can play in a partial assessment of our liberal arts program. The report does not suggest that all colleges must adopt either the St. John's (Annapolis) Great Books curriculum or an

"educational garage sale" approach to curriculum offerings. It suggests instead that undergraduate liberal arts colleges should develop a common curriculum with the humanities at the core. I believe we can discuss this question on its merits without bringing in Vietnam. Yes, there was a war in Vietnam. And while we can bemoan that fact and levy criticisms at American politics and society, this does not decide the question whether or not to include Aristotle's works (or Plato's or Socrates') in a pantheon of great books or thinkers. Nor does it make the study of Aristotle irrelevant to today's needs. Such a study may help us to understand competing notions of justice and to determine what "moral" alternatives are available in the world of political action. It will force us to exercise our reason. The study of Aristotle may be beneficial, but I recognize that by itself it is insufficient to satisfy our educational needs.

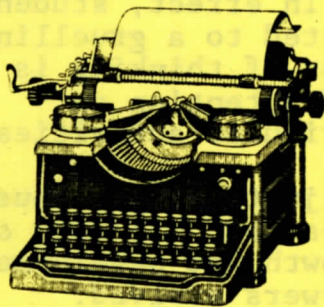
Bennett would include in his "humanities core" liberal arts courses which would cover western civilization (from antiquity to the present); masterworks in English, American, and European literature; the most significant ideas and debates in the history of philosophy; the history of science and technology; at least one non-western culture (involving an in-depth study); and foreign languages. Of course, the School's curriculum, if it is to be appealing, should go well beyond the subject areas listed above. We need an apple and not just a core. We must expand upon the Bennett plan to meet our own needs, interests, and political/educational/cultural agenda. The central question we must address, however, is this: do the humanities form or represent an essential core of knowledge, experience, and understanding which an "educated" woman should possess? If so, what should be included in this part of our curriculum? Which of the elements listed above in the report should be left out of our core? If we were to adopt as our principal textbook How the World Works by Karl Marx, or some other economist, we could probably jettison all of Bennett's suggestions, but I doubt if any of us would seriously suggest such a thing.

I was surprised that more of our faculty did not support Bennett's suggestion to incorporate in a core curriculum the elements listed above and then move to congratulate ourselves on already having undertaken the difficult task of implementing such a plan. Should we now, I hesitate to ask, bother to assess to what degree we actually cover the "Great Books" in our curriculum? I think if we reviewed the syllabi of the courses taught in SAS we would find a high percentage of the works cited by Bennett already included in our curriculum. Should we be ashamed of this and try to remove them, or should we proudly advertise that they are included?

Let us address the thorny question of implementation. Should we have a humanities core which appears to incorporate a list of Great Books? If we as a faculty cannot agree that there is a large list of "great books" and then proceed to narrow that list in some places and expand it in others to make it fit our own needs, objectives and abilities, I suggest we close our doors tomorrow. If we limit our

curriculum to only such a list, I suggest we close our doors tomorrow. I do not believe that people are completely, fully, or even adequately educated by reading all of Bennett's books. I do believe, however, that someone cannot be said to be completely, fully, or even adequately educated unless he or she is exposed to a good number of the books on Bennett's List.

B. Nelson Ong



EXCERPTA

Russell Edgerton (president of the American Association for Higher Education). "Abilities That Last a Lifetime." AAHE Bulletin February 1984: 3-4.

"What is essential to teach? This master question underlies many of the crucial issues facing colleges and universities today.

The question comes at us out of our own successes. As a matter of public policy, we have won the battle of easy access. Americans of average academic ability and modest means now routinely go on from high school to college. But what kind of college, and what kind of program, should we provide?

The question comes at us out of scarcity and the need for retrenchment planning. If we can't have everything, what is most important, and what can go?

It comes at us because we are rapidly becoming a new kind of society - a society where people live into their nineties and undergo startling changes along the way in their jobs, careers, personal relationships, and communities. What is essential to prepare students for this new society? . . .

Let's look first at the answers colleges and universities

across the country now give to the master question - what is essential? It seems to me that there are four main answers, each the product of a particular historical tradition.

Up until the Civil War, colleges considered their essential mission to be the teaching of mental discipline and character. What is key from my perspective is that the professors of that period regarded the subjects found in the classic curriculum as means, not ends. They did not think that the sons of the elite families who were their students really needed to write and speak Greek and Latin in order to be effective ministers, lawyers, and doctors. Rather, they used these subjects as vehicles to teach what they did think was important - mental discipline.

To be sure, their version of mental discipline was a far cry from what we would today call critical thinking. In effect, students memorized great gobs of stuff and then were subjected to a gruelling oral quiz. But the insight was there - the process of thinking is what really counts. Coupled with this was lots of attention on manners and attitudes, enforced through extra-curricular activities which included such features as compulsory chapel.

By the time of the Civil War, this model was just too precious and preppy for a nation that was conquering the west and standing on the verge of an industrial revolution. In the growth and development of higher education after the war, three other answers evolved.

Cornell, harkening back to the Scottish tradition, pioneered answer #2: the teaching of practical, useful knowledge. Instead of wordly gentlemen, colleges in the land grant tradition saw themselves turning out individuals who were technically trained - mechanics and farmers who knew how to apply the new knowledge emerging in these fields.

Johns Hopkins, in the German tradition, pioneered answer #3: passing on the fruits of scientific inquiry. For the new professors of the new universities coming into being, their disciplinary fields of knowledge were what was important. As teachers, they took time out to transmit the emerging knowledge of these fields to their students.

Lastly, in part in reaction to the specialization of these two models, a number of colleges organized themselves around the ideal of a more well-rounded, cultured person. What was essential was to give students a base of general and liberal knowledge.

Each of these traditions informs the present, but you know what happened. After WWII, the research universities became not only the center of prestige but the supplier of most of the faculty who went out to teach in the other four-year institutions. Community colleges grew up to carry the tradition of teaching practical, technical knowledge to new and surprising lengths. The idea of teaching liberal/general knowledge survives in private liberal arts colleges and other places, but is badly battered by the forces of disciplinary specialization.

Submerged in all this are modern descendants of the tradition of teaching mental discipline and character. Every good teacher worries in some fashion about teaching students how to think. Curricular concerns such as teaching basic skills, critical thinking skills, competency-based education, and writing-across-the-curriculum have all focused on the processes of learning rather than the content of particular subjects. Yet none of these movements had made much of a dent on the dominant practice of the professoriate to transmit information and knowledge about their subject matter specialties.

Hardest to find are traces of character development. Some small colleges still form what Warren Bryan Martin calls "communities of conviction." Faculty, outside speakers, and the like serve as role models whether they intend to or not. But most of the trends - the growth in the size of institutions, the shift from residential to commuting institutions, the new patterns of student attendance, the increased enrollment of experienced adult learners, and other factors - have eroded the grip of the extra-curriculum.

What we've got, in short, is a set of institutions and a generation of faculty devoted to the transmission of information and knowledge. But is this what our students really need? I think not. I think this historically evolved function needs to make room for another approach - preparing our students for work, citizenship, and personal fulfillment in the post-industrial era.

Looking at the near-term demands of the workforce, there is not a terrific argument for turning out larger quantities of college-educated people. There is not even a terrific argument - despite the recent media hype over high technology - for supplying the workforce with vastly increased numbers of engineers, computer scientists, and other experts with similar backgrounds. Or so it seems to me, after reading and thinking about these issues for several months.

But there is a desperate need for "take charge" people, and it is a need which exists at all levels. At the top, we need people who have the initiative and persistence to make the large bureaucracies we've created work, and to break out of these bureaucracies and create new jobs. Recent studies suggest that, at least during the 1970's, it was the firms with twenty employees or less that created most of the new jobs we had. At the lowest level, it now looks now as if millions of people will be taking low-level service jobs - like dishing out hamburgers at McDonalds - which tend to be deadends without rungs to another tier. Individuals in these positions are going to have to create their own ladders to better positions. And they'll need plenty of gumption to do so.

A second and equally desperate need is for people who have the versatility to change, to learn new things quickly, to roll with the punches of job and career change. In The Next American Frontier, Robert Reich makes a persuasive argument that our economic future depends on our capacity to shift from standardized production to what he calls flexible systems production. We need versatile

organizations which can shift gears, and turn out products and services which have shorter and shorter lives. Inside these versatile organizations will have to be versatile people who can work together and shift to new things.

The new requirements for meaningful citizenship are, if anything, even more dramatic. Scientific and technological "progress" is increasingly enlarging the scope of what must be considered public. We are now in the presence of weapons, drugs, and other products which have enormous social consequences. Because these issues are so technical and complex, we increasingly turn to experts and single-issue interest groups to make decisions about them for us.

Enter into this unhealthy situation one of the most central and far-reaching trends of our time: communication, other than face-to-face communication, is becoming increasingly electronic. In case you haven't noticed, the biases built into the structure of the electronic medium are not things to cheer about. As society becomes more and more complex, attention spans are getting shorter and shorter and issues are becoming increasingly simplified.

What kinds of talent do we need to counteract this situation? Certainly people who care enough, and see the connections sufficiently, want to get involved in community and public life. But more than that, there are people who believe that they can make a difference. There are some intellectual components to this. For example, self-confidence in the fact of expertise probably comes from the experience of mastering some technical subject. But efficacy also comes from learning by doing. People must develop intellectual and interpersonal abilities and test them in real performance situations.

I could go on, but this is, perhaps, enough to make the point. Preparing people for the future is very much a matter of ability development. If done right, ability development can lead to a sense of efficacy, self-confidence, and a general disposition to take charge."

Submitted by Ann Raia

From an interview with Tom Peters, co-author of In Search of Excellence, published in Exxon Today.

"We asked . . . which companies consistently had the leading edge in innovation, . . . which companies managed to respond best to political and social conditions, market demands, product quality, and the like. . . . We found that every last one of the (125 companies) operated within corporate philosophies that emphasized a very simple, straightforward cause-and-effect value system. They all said that if you treat your customers and your employees right, the financial end will take care of itself. For example, IBM has a simple, three-point philosophy that goes like

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this: (1) Respect the individual. (2) Provide the best service in the world. (3) Excel in execution."

EXXON USA: "Achieving excellence, then, is a matter of attitude?"

PETERS: "Yes. Attitudes set in motion and inspired by leadership that firmly believes in and practices those common-sense precepts. Often, it is a chief executive officer. But you may find such leadership at any level. When this kind of excellence prevails, you've got an outstanding company."

EXXON USA: "If excellence in organization is just a matter of common sense, why don't we see more of it?"

PETERS: "Most often it is because the organization and its people get lost in a maze of distracting detail and purposeless activity that has nothing to do with getting the work done. We didn't find greed or malice in America's companies. We saw very little stupidity or outright laziness. On the contrary, most people work very hard. But we did find people burdened with unproductive rules and regulations, usually built up by years of well-intentioned directives until at last the rules became their main activity."

Submitted by Jim O'Brien



LINGUA

Lingua examines the arcane world of literary criticism with "Eloise Disclosed" by Felicia Lamport, from The Overwrought Urn, ed. Charles Kaplan, subtitled "a potpourri of parodies of critics who triumphantly present the real meaning of authors from Jane Austen to J. D. Salinger" (New York: Pegasus, 1969).

Not since the time of Swift and Rabelais has there been as cleverly disguised a piece of social commentary as the two-volume work purporting to deal with a child named . . . "Eloise." The art of concealing trenchant analysis under the cloak of alleged juvenile

humor has seldom been practiced with greater dexterity; the cloak has an air of such plausibility that no critic has yet ventured to peer beneath it. . . .

To be sure, it was virtually impossible to recognize the profound and disturbing implications of the first volume until the appearance of the second provided the necessary clues. Only then could the petals of allegory be unfolded one by one until the conception became visible as a whole; only then could it be seen that the child, Eloise, was actually devised as a surrogate for The American in Mid-Century, and that the situation in which the "child" is depicted is the brilliantly symbolic analysis of Everyman's tragic condition.

The author subtly leads us to the proper mood with the very title of the second volume (Eloise in Paris): the Eloise de Paris, though apparently only a heartrending little anagram on Eloise in despair, also serves to show us the direction in which the child has been moving throughout the first volume. Looking back, we find that the whole saga begins with what we now recognize as a cri-de-coeur: "I am Eloise I am six." In this statement we are at once able to discover the simple play on words masking the true meaning: "I am sick." Further confirmation, if any were needed, is found in the ending which, with a bit of technical virtuosity reminiscent of Joyce's Finnegans Wake, brings the narrative to full circle with a double reiteration of the illness theme, first disguised as a sham sickness ("And Nanny has to get up and pamper me . . . while I am out of my head with fever and pain"), then returning to the original word-play with an added note of pathos: "After all I am only six" (sick). The symbolic child, like her prototype, cannot bring herself to more than a dim, peripheral realization of her condition.

We know, then, of the existence of this illness; but what is its nature? This, as one might suspect, is a more difficult problem in view of the fact that all knowledge of the illness itself is repressed. One must deduce from negative evidence. What, one asks, is the salient lack in the luxurious and frenetic life of this child? The answer is at once apparent: she is living without a mother, a deprivation made the more poignant by her complete failure to recognize it as such. Yet this is the problem only in its most superficial sense. What is the deeper meaning? Given our understanding of the author's deft sense of word-play, the answer is not hard to find. "Mother" is simply the prosopopoeic adaptation of its synonym, "matrix," and the problem thus exposed is not merely that of a child's unconscious attempt to compensate for the absence of a mother, but of Everyman's desperation in the face of life without a focus, without a matrix.

From this the allegory broadens with ineluctable logic. We have first the child's deeply revealing matutinal rite: "Then I . . . look at the ceiling for awhile and try to think of a way to

get a present." To the casual reader, interpreting "present" as "gift," the phrase would seem a puzzling one; the child, having infinite financial credit and the latitude to use it, obviously has no need of gifts. However, following the deeper theme, we realize that this work indicates that Everyman, finding his present life untenable, is desperately seeking some alternative to the "nothingness" that surrounds him. . . .

Granting the terrible emptiness of life without a matrix, where is our protagonist to turn? This question brings us to the very heart of the author's incisive analysis. We have penetrated the underbrush and are at last in sight of the fundamental point: retroactive tropism. Seen in this light the child's telephonic cathexis is not merely an aimless evasion, but a dynamic and purposeful little ballet of flight. What is it that she seeks when, in every crisis, she turns to the telephone? What does she hope to find at "the end of the line"? It is René, the waiter who, now that we have the key, is obviously her yearning to be reborn (re-né) into a new and different life. At once the umbilical function of the telephone cord becomes apparent, and the punning conversion of the womb and its cervical passage into "room service" is so obvious as to approach vulgarity.

Hanging as she is in the limbo between an untenable present and an unfulfillable dream of the past, Eloise (the lost child in everyone) is naturally engaged in a desperate ego-drive, or struggle to find her identity. This theme is rung with delicate changes throughout both volumes, appearing first and most frequently in the reiteration: "It is me Eloise," a pathetic though gallant attempt to create an identity by simple, dogged reassertion.

Paralleling the search for identity we note the faint refrain of Everyman's transcendental aspirations in the "Nanny" figure. This symbol tends to be puzzling until we grasp the fine innuendoes of the deliberate ambiguity. In one respect "Nanny" functions as the superego ("Eloise you cawn't"), yet the clear Trinitarian implication of her propensity for saying "everything three times" marks her as an essentially religious figure. (Has the struggle to reconcile God and Freud ever been more succinctly dramatized?) However, the small amount of security that Nanny offers in this dual capacity is scarcely sufficient to affect the child's Weltanschauung, or even to penetrate its hard core of skepticism. Observe the wry neological use of the letters "sk" (as in "sklathe," "skibble," "skidder," etc.) by which even the simplest of actions is colored with the hue of skepticism.

Space unfortunately does not permit a full exploration of the attitude toward the male that is so acidly sketched in these volumes. However, it is in the treatment of the male condition that the author's subjective intensity betrays his (as it must surely be) own sex; and the signature, "Kay Thompson," considered as a chosen pseudonym, hints provocatively for identification with—"Cato's Son."